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TO : S/P - Mr. Merriam

FROM : NE - Mr. Mattison

DATE: April 18, 1949

SUBJECT: Attitude of Near Eastern States towards regional pacts

Department of State

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General:

With the signal failure of Arab League efforts to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and the resulting attempts by various member states to place the blame on others, one does not find at present a particularly favorable atmosphere for regional pacts unless with firm great-power guarantee. The whole recent tendency has been that of seeking some form of protective alignment with a strong western power. There has been a tendency towards "going along" with an Asian bloc, but this would seem to be more in the nature of a flirtation rather than a serious affair. The current alarms and excursions over schemes such as the "Fertile Crescent", "Greater Syria", etc., perhaps represent the regional approach in the extreme sense but not within the definition of the idea as I conceive it.

Egypt:

Egypt, the first Arab State to count herself "out" of the Palestine war, had recently shown a much more friendly attitude towards the British, and General Slim's visit to Egypt and the list of British defense requirements have seemingly met with not too hostile a reception. It is fairly certain that Egypt would not object to being included in a Mediterranean Pact (provided that Israel was not included). Egypt would probably prefer a tripartite agreement with Britain and the United States. She realizes the advantages of a defense relationship with Great Britain, but would prefer to have the United States dealt in, so that the prize package could be presented to the people as something different than the politically long-belabored relationship with the British.

Saudi Arabia:

While paying lip service to Arab unity, Ibn Saud would prefer an out-and-out defense relationship with the United States. Second preference would be a tripartite arrangement with the United States and Great Britain. He would probably not be interested in joining a regional pact unless it were backed by a firm commitment from the United States and/or Great Britain.

Yemen:

Would probably be willing to join in a regional pact provided it were nothing much stronger than the present Arab League pact. Would not be prepared to enter any pact which might involve granting bases to any foreign power.

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power. Perhaps would accept a pact involving great-power guarantees, but it is doubtful if Yemen would be willing to assume any reciprocal obligations.

Iraq:

Iraq is obviously worried about its future. It has so far dodged the onus of defeat in Palestine by withdrawing its troops and letting Transjordan negotiate with Israel. It has expressed a desire for a greater Western orientation, and presumably would be willing to join in a pact with great-power guarantees. Iraq, like Egypt, would like some face saving formula which would not leave Great Britain as its sole defender. It would be willing to join any regional arrangement either looking towards greater Arab unity or even with wider regional implications (i.e., Turkey and Iran).

Syria:

Syria with its recent military coup d'etat remains somewhat of an enigma, but all signs point towards a desire towards greater western orientation. The previous administration had felt its weakness following the Palestine debacle, and had given distinct indication of wishing to come to some defensive arrangement with either Britain or the United States or both. The new administration has expressed a desire for greater Arab unity, but not within the framework of existing "projects". Zayim speaks in terms of military alliances with the Arab States. These may have a local publicity value but there are indications that Zayim would not be adverse to a regional pact with great-power guarantees. How willing he would be to grant reciprocal privileges is not certain.

Lebanon:

Lebanon would welcome any regional arrangement which would allay the fears of Lebanese Christians who view themselves as a small Christian island in the midst of an Islamic sea. To the Lebanese such an arrangement would of necessity require a great-power guarantee. They would probably prefer a straight alignment with some western power:- in order of preference: 1) the United States; 2) Great Britain; 3) France.

Transjordan:

Transjordan is already in alliance with Great Britain, and has closer ties with that country than any other Arab state. It would welcome closer relationships with the United States and tends to think in terms of great-power guarantees. Its regional thinking tends to be almost entirely in terms of bringing larger territories under Abdullah's rule. Therefore, it is unlikely that it would look with favor on any regional arrangement which would too closely guarantee the frontiers of Arab States which figure in Abdullah's Greater Syria scheme. Any regional arrangement that involved closer grouping of the Arab States, and which did not preclude some form of union would

probably be looked on with favor.

Israel:

Israel has announced its intention of remaining neutral in the East-West controversy. Therefore, it would probably be most reluctant to enter into any regional arrangement which involved great power backing. While it would probably not object to a purely local regional arrangement, it is difficult to believe that any Arab State would yet be prepared to enter into any such arrangement with Israel.

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